No. 28

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"But I think it is best," the old gentleman persisted. "I have tried to point out to Alice the error of her ways. I received nothing but impudence for my pains."

R. of M. G., No. 28.

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THE NIELEN PUBLISHING CO.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

PERHAPS Ruth had been guilty of encouraging one of the guests at the hotel with her big eyes. But she aroused her husband's ire by constantly accepting attention from a man who was an utter stranger to them both.

When he asked her to quit it, she laughed at him.

One evening at the conclusion of another argument. Guy, having finished dressing for dinner a few minutes sooner than his wife, decided to go down into the lounging room and wait for her there.

The room was separated from the dining room by a glass partition. As he waited he had an opportunity to watch the guests who passed through for dinner.

He had conceived a violent dislike for the man who insistently made eyes at Ruth. The individual came into the lounging room and glanced about. Then he walked over to the glass partition and peered into the dining room.

Evidently he was disappointed about something, for he entered reluctantly.

"I'd like to break his neck," was Guy Fillmore's mental observation. "I suppose he doesn't want to eat his dinner until Ruth comes down."

With his brow clouded he sunk deeper into his chair.

Apparently there was no one else present in the lounging room, and he decided this was his opportunity to take his lovely young wife to task for what seemed a flirtation.

Presently Ruth appeared. She had not seen her husband. Gliding up to the glass partition, she peeped in and smiled.

Guy believed that she had seen him, and that she looked into the dining room to find out whether her unknown admirer was there.

He also believed that that smile on her face had been provoked by this admirer's presence.

"Ah, I thought so," he muttered. "You never can trust a woman."

A few moments passed. Fillmore was no longer looking in the direction where Ruth still stood. He was staring at the floor, seeing horrible things.

Suddenly he was startled by her voice.

"Ah, there you are!" it exclaimed. "I was wondering where you had gone."

She spoke so vivaciously and so lovingly that one would have thought that, the place being deserted, the young husband would have sprung at the young wife and kissed her on the spot.

But no! The young husband did not move. He did not even look at the young wife.

He glared aside. His mouth worked and he bit his lip. His hands dug themselves into the very depths of his pockets indicating that he was in a state of considerable emotional disturbance.

"Aren't you coming in to dinner?" she asked sweetly.

"No!" grunted Fillmore. "I am not!"

"But why not, Guy?" she demanded in gentle, complete amazement. "What is the matter?"

In that moment Guy Fillmore was absolutely astounded at his wife's power of duplicity.

Here was a young woman whom he had believed to be quite different from all other women whatsoever—a pal as well as a wife; and now every tone of her voice and every word she said, lied to him foolishly and without the least hope of deceiving him.

She asked him what was the matter when she knew it!

"I am not going in to dinner until that fellow at

the table next to ours has come out," Guy announced in a tone of finality. "And now you know."

She gave a low, light laugh.

"Oh it is that? You are still worrying about that," she said, just as though fifteen minutes sooner they had not had quite a scene about the man who always sat at the table next to theirs in the dining room.

Ruth's method of conducting an argument was exasperating to the last degree.

"I had hopes that you would forget it, Guy. It is so foolish," she told him.

"I am not likely to forget it!" he snorted savagely. "I am reminded of it every time we go into that dining room."

He paused and looked his young wife over. He was in such spiritual pain that her extraordinary physical attractiveness became loathsome to him.

He hated it because it made men stare at her with leering eyes.

Ruth had never seen her husband in such a vicious mood. Ever since their marriage he had shown an inclination to jealousy, although, so far as she could remember, she had given him no real cause.

"Please be sensible, dear," she coaxed. "I told you upstairs that I did not speak to that man at any time. I don't even know his name."

"Neither do I," he retorted. "Just the same anybody can see that he is one of those fellows who are constantly on the lookout for pretty married women who want to flirt. He is a cad."

Ruth shrugged her shoulders as she answered:

"Don't you think you might be doing him an injustice? So far as I am able to judge he is anything but a cad."

"Is that so?" Guy returned quickly. "Well, some

married women like cads. So far as this fellow is concerned I am sick and tired of seeing him make eyes at you. I could kill him when you smile at him. Now don't say you never did. I am not blind, Ruth."

Ruth was not disposed to see the seriousness of the argument. She uttered a soft laugh.

"What a silly man you are," she said. "I can't understand you at all. I never heard of such a thing. I suppose I ought to be flattered by your darn fool jealousy."

"Jealousy!" he sneered.

"Yes, jealousy," she repeated. "And I may as well tell you that I am not a bit flattered."

Ruth still spoke evenly and kindly, somewhat like a mother to a child, though she was five years younger than her husband. She imagined that her equanimity was very clever, but it maddened Guy.

He began losing control of himself, and found a terrible satisfaction in doing so.

The dreadful thoughts, suspicions, accusations, criticisms and condemnations about our best friends which lie hidden in the bottom of the heart of all of us, and upon the concealment of which depends the safety and decency of human relations, rose up unchecked to the surface and escaped in speech.

Guy Fillmore called his lovely young wife a flirt. He referred to her hunger for pleasure and luxury, to her egotism, to her vanity and to her faulty upbringing.

Ruth took it all calmly enough.

"I am afraid I have married a jealous monster," she said somewhat sadly, then added with an assumption of courage: "But I will have to make the best of it. Well, old dear, if you are not going in to dinner, I am. You better take a stroll and pull yourself together. The exercise will do you good."

She did not go immediately, but stood there gazing at Guy with real sorrow in her young eyes.

So far as she could remember she had never smiled at the man seated at the next table. And if she had? He was absolutely nothing to her.

Ruth did not intend to scowl at anyone merely to please her husband. She had always suspected that he watched her closely in the presence of others. But in this case he was going too far.

This scene was too much. It was almost tragic because it ruined all chances of any future happiness.

She thought of her romantic marriage, of Guy's tenderness and his passion. This man sitting there with that black look on his face could not be the same.

Finally she turned away with a fixed, expressionless smile, toward the dining room.

She was determined to see the thing through. She would eat and drink if she choked doing it.

She did not guess that if she had burst into tears and fled up to her room he would have followed her, furious at first—and then contrite.

Guy Fillmore watched his lovely young wife depart. There was a noise in his ears that somehow seemed to indicate what was happening to his happy marriage.

He felt exhausted and also frightened. He was quite alone, Ruth having disappeared into the dining room.

"Oh, hell!" he swore furiously. "I might have expected it!"

And then he became conscious that he was not so much alone as he had thought himself to be.

A few yards away stood a leather arm chair with a high back. At the top of that back a head became visible, then a man's shoulders.

Guy's face flushed hotly. Every word of the argu-

ment between Ruth and himself had been overheard by this individual.

"I am very sorry I happened to be here," the man said with real sympathy in his voice. "Of course, I overheard and I know how you must feel, young man."

As he uttered these words the man came over to Guy and stood looking down upon him. He was a little gray-haired man, apparently about sixty. The expression in his eyes was that of one who had seen a great sorrow.

Fillmore remembered the man. He always came very late into the dining room for his meals, always eating by himself.

He was well-dressed and to all appearances a gentleman. Yet, there was something queer and disconcerting about him. He looked distinguished and his accent was that of an Englishman.

"Young fellow," he spoke in a kindly tone. "There is nobody in the world who understands this situation between you and your young wife better than I do. And nobody has a better right to warn you that if you can't control that insane jealousy of yours, you have a fair chance of a tragedy in your life.

"Go over there to that mirror and look at your face. It is so distorted that you will hardly recognize yourself. You believe yourself to be a man. Right now you are anything but that.

"You are what remains after the devil has taken possession of him and devastated him. You are unhappy I can see. But your unhappiness comes from within the recesses of your own soul. What you must do is, change your mental attitude at once."

Guy started up angrily.

"Look here!" he protested with a sudden burst of vehemence. "What right have you to———"

"None, absolutely none," the other confessed. "But, please, do not fly into a rage and threaten to beat me up. You see, I am an old man." He smiled whimsically. "I know more about this old game of life than perhaps both you and your pretty young wife will ever know. I wish I could prevail upon you to permit me to be your friend and adviser. Won't you lete me be that?"

Fillmore was utterly at a loss how to meet this strange situation.

After a moment's scrutiny of the deeply lined features so close to his, he forced an apologetic little smile. It was a very nice smile.

"I suppose you have heard of the Carey-Hamiltn case," the stanger went on as he seated himself. "I am sure you have. No?"

Guy shook his head.

"No, I don't think I have, sir."

"You have not heard?" came back disappointedly. "Well, I suppose you are too young to remember one of the greatest public events of the early nineties. But it might interest you to know that I was the most celebrated man in this country for a few weeks at least. But now I am forgotten."

"May I ask your name, sir?" Guy said.

"You may and I'll tell you," was the rejoinder. My name is Carey. And I am the man who murdered Mr. Hamilton. I murdered him in cold blood because I was jealous of him. That is why I wanted to speak to you, young man."

"Yes?" Fillmore raised his eyebrows. "You spoke to me and I am grateful for the little sermon you delivered."

"But that is not all," Mr. Carey retorted quickly. "The real sermon is contained in the story I want to tell you. Will you be kind enough to listen? I promise to

make it as brief as possible."

Guy Fillmore inclined his head as an indication that he was willing to listen. Somehow he found himself shaking all over.

Way down in his heart he had absolutely no desire to listen, but he had been intimidated by the singular attitude of this Mr. Carey.

He had been awed by the conjunction of the words "jealousy" and "murder", and by the horror of his own frightful feelings only a few minutes ago.

This little man before him was a self-confessed murderer.

Why had he not been made to pay the penalty? How came he to be at large and staying at one of the exclusive New York family hotels?

"May I begin my story?" he heard the little old man say.

Guy roused himself and sat up with a jerk.

"Yes," he answered. "I am listening."

Chapter 90

A TRAGIC TALE.

AS A rule Guy Fillmore always found a plausible excuse to absent himself when someone suggested telling about his experiences in life. Nothing in the world bored him more than that. But in his present frame of mind he was eager to hear something which might serve to divert his mind from miserable thoughts.

He wanted to forget the fact that his young wife was eating her dinner without him, and that she was carrying on her flirtation with the man he had learned to hate.

The little old man had moved closer. He had lighted a cigar and offered Fillmore one. The latter accepted it with a grateul smile.

"Let me see," Mr. Carey began slowly, as if searching the chambers of his memory for data. "I think it was in 1890 in London. I was a young man then, impulsive and hot-blooded. I was born with a romantic nature. What that means I need not tell you. I always longed for the impossible.

"I had just finished my college education and was ready to begin my career as an electrical engineer. At a reception given by a friend, I met a young woman of singular attractiveness.

"She was introduced to me as Mrs. Hamilton, and later I learned that she had come without her husband. She had the most provoking smile of any woman I ever knew.

"It happened that we were seated side by side at

dinner, and we indulged in a friendly chat. Most of her remarks were interpolated with sighs.

"When I asked her if she was unhappy she admitted it in a low spoken word and a smile so pathetic that my heart went out to her instantly.

"Her husband was a man twenty years older than herself. They had nothing in common. His aim in life seemed to be making money. Smarting under the constant neglect, Mrs. Hamilton was not above carrying on a mild flirtation with someone else.

"We had been mutually attracted and we met frequently after that reception. I was madly in love with her, and she loved me in the same degree. We just could not help it, and we didn't know what to do under the circumstances.

"Before I go any further," the speaker said, flicking the ashes from his cigar, "let me impress upon your mind that Mrs. Hamilton was a good woman.

"She would not do anything wrong, and she would not leave her husband because her faith forbid it. I brooded over the situation until I became frantic. I could not live without her, and I could not have her.

"Mrs. Hamilton had presented me with a fine pearl-handled pocket knife as a keepsake. An evil fate must have possessed her when she gave that knife to me, for it proved to be my undoing.

"Then came, what we agreed to be our last meeting. We both realized how utterly useless it was to continue in our mutual infatuation. She had prevailed upon her husband to take her abroad. Within a week they were to leave London and cross the channel for France.

"That last meeting I shall never forget. Mrs. Hamilton clung to me and wept. I was mad enough to risk anything to own her. I proposed that we elope. But she refused when I thought my wildest dream was to

come true.

"Utterly beside myself, I demanded that her husband should be told about our love. I insisted upon taking her home.

"She tried to coax me not to go with her, but I would not listen. Mr. Hamilton came home from his office and found me waiting for him in the library.

"I at once told him the truth in his wife's presence. He did not grow angry and threaten to have me thrown from the house. He did the worst thing he possibly could have done. He laughed at me.

"He went up to his wife and put an arm around her. I could not stand the way he owned her. It drove me mad. Then the devil rushed over me. I drew the pearl-handled pocket knife Mrs. Hamilton had given me, and I stabbed her husband to death.

"The scene I will not attempt to describe. As I fled I carried with me the vision of the woman lying on the floor in a dead faint and the servants rushing into the room.

"But what I recall most vividly was the terrible joy I experienced while I was stabbing the man.

"Oh, I know perfectly well what I was doing. Only it wasn't me. It was someone else in me. Mrs. Hamilton's screams shall ring in my ears until my dying day. They seemed to urge me on, they maddened me still more.

"They said afterward that I had stabbed her husband twenty-four times. Of course, I was arrested. I fully expected to be, and I did not care in the least.

"Life without the woman I loved was not worth living anyway. Then I learned to my horror that Mrs. Hamilton had been arrested also.

"At the trial which followed shortly the prosecution brought out the fact that Mrs. Hamilton had given me the knife. As evidence of our love affair they pro-

duced some of the letters she had written to me.

"It was taken for granted that we two had deliberately planned her husband's murder. That was an absolute untruth.

"Neither Mrs. Hamilton nor I had the least idea of what was to happen that day when I decided to speak to her husband. It was done on an impulse — a mad impulse.

"The trial did not last long. Mrs. Hamilton and I were both convicted and sentenced to death. I thought the jury was insame. I screamed at the top of my voice that the woman I loved was innocent, and at last I fainted.

"Genevieve Hamilton did not faint. She looked at me with those big brown eyes of hers. I recovered quickly and was taken back to my cell.

"I never saw her again after that. There was no appeal in those days. There was only the Home Secretary to go to.

"The newspapers printed columns and columns about the murder. The affair was enlarged upon by all foreign and especially the American newspapers. Some of my friends started a petition for a reprieve.

"I had inherited a fortune from my father and much of it was spent trying to avert what seemed to be the inevitable.

"Then I learned that the Home Secretary had refused to interfere in my case. I made inquiries about Genevieve Hamilton, but they would not tell me anything about her. Prison rules forbid that.

"Then I began to realize that I had not many more days to live. Two guards kept a close watch over me. And they were friendly fellows. I tried to bribe them to tell me something about Genevieve Hamilton, but neither would say a word.

"The fact that I was condemned to be hung was of secondary consideration. Remorse of the worst possible kind possessed me. I regretted having killed Hamilton, of course.

"But having brought an innocent woman into a fix like mine was something I could not endure. Yes, I had brought her face to face with the most ghastly ruin, for she was to hang like myself.

"I cursed the stupidity of the jury. I cursed the prosecuting attorney for his frightful blunder. I cursed the Home Secretary who refused to listen to my plea in behalf of Mrs. Hamilton.

"Once more I put the entire case in writing and submitted it to the Lord Mayor himself. My surprise was great when he came to my cell in person.

"He told me that he was sorry he could do nothing for me, but that in all probability Genevieve Hamilton would be reprieved. I was overjoyed.

"I began to wonder why I had worried so terribly about her. Of course, they could not hang her. She was innocent, and she was a woman."

At this point, Guy Fillmore, who had been an intensely interested listener, interrupted the speaker.

"Was Mrs. Hamilton reprieved?" he asked breathlessly.

"I—I am not telling my story very well," Mr. Carey replied. "I have never told it to a living soul, and I am forgetting things. I am mixing matters somewhat.

"I had forgotten about the chapel on Execution Sunday—that is the last Sunday before the execution. I was taken into the chapel by myself, then, after all the others.

"In a pew all alone I knelt. As the other prisoners passed me on their way out, they refused to look at me. On another occasion when I met some of them in the

corridor, they turned their heads.

"When I asked the guards why they did that, they blushed and remained silent. Later I persuaded one of them to tell me the truth. He said that it is an unwritten law. Prisoners never look at a man condemned to die on the gallows.

"A day later the Governor sent for me. I was taken into his office. He smiled kindly as he told me to be seated. He even offered me a cigar.

" 'Carey," he began, 'I am not a religious man. I don't know anything about heaven, and I don't know anything about hell. That is the chaplain's business. But you are going to die to-morrow. And before you pass into the great beyond, I would like to know if you are sorry for having killed Mr. Hamilton.'

" 'I am very sorry, sir,' I answered.

"He spoke to me for some little time about the murder, and the subsequent trial, then I was taken back to my cell. I laid down and tried to get some sleep. But it was impossible. I was thinking every minute about Genevieve Hamilton, wondering if she were free.

"And then finally the last morning dawned. One of the guards came in and wanted to know what I would like for breakfast—my last meal on earth. I gave my order, which consisted of fried ham and eggs, potatoes and coffee.

"I ate with my usual good appetite, although in less than two hours I would be hung. I heard the prison clock strike a little later. I had just one more hour to live.

"And this last hour was the longest of my life. I heard the keys rattle as the prison chaplain came in to prepare me for the end.

"The Governor was with him as well as the assistant executioner and a physician. They gave me some

brandy to drink. Then the assistant executioner fastened my arms by tying them behind my back. Then we went out into the corridor in a sort of a procession.

"We came to a large room in which stood the scaffold. I mounted the steps without faltering. Within a few minutes all would be over. I knew I was placed on the trap door to be sprung.

"Suddenly there was a dull, sickening thud, and I could not make out what had happened, but I heard voices very distinctly.

"'You'll have to go through with it,' one voice cried.

"'Not for all the money in the world,' another voice replied.

"Afterwards I found out what had happened. My execution had been bungled. The bag was removed from my head and I was taken back to my cell. To my utter surprise I was informed a day later that my death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment.

"Of course, there is no such a thing as life imprisonment. After serving about twenty-five years you are let out. I was happy, for had not the woman whom I loved so madly been reprieved long ago?

"My one thought was to find her and make amends for the misery I had brought upon her. To my horror I discovered that I had been deceived by the prison authorities. They had led me to believe that Genevieve was to be reprieved in order to keep me from going insane.

"She had been executed the same hour my own was bungled by the assistant executioner. This news almost crazed me. Cold fury possessed me. I was seriously considering killing every man who had lied to me.

"But I had seen death at close range. What good would to do me to throw my life away. I have often thought how it would feel to cross the border and join

Genevieve on the other side. Twice I jumped into the river and was fished out each time. Once I shot myself below the heart and the doctors pulled me through.

"Finally I came to the conclusion that God wanted me to live so that I might expiate my crime in full. The punishment I received in living was frightful. Every hour of the day and night my heart cries out for the one woman I loved.

"In my frenzied jealousy I wrought not only my undoing, but hers as well. When I heard you and your pretty young wife argue," the speaker concluded, "I could not resist setting you right, young man.

"Unreasonable jealousy has made me the most wretched of men. Now go into the dining room and apologize to your wife. I have seen her often enough to know that she is a good girl."

Guy Fillmore extended his hand, which the other took with a smile.

"You are right, Mr. Carey," the young husband exclaimed. "I made a very serious mistake and——"

At this point there was a loud thud not far away. Ruth, repenting her resolution to eat alone without her husband, had returned to the lounging room unobserved and buried herself in a big armchair.

She was close enough to the two men to hear every word of Mr. Carey's grewsome story. At the climax she had fallen to the floor in a faint.

Guy rushed to her side and lifted her bobbed head.

"Ruth—Ruth, speak to me!" he begged, tears in his eyes.

Slowly her eyelids lifted and she looked up at her husband and smiled.

"I have been a fool," Guy murmured, pressing her to his heart. "Forgive me, darling, and I'll promise never to be jealous again."

Her only answer was another smile, and when his lips sought hers, she gave them eagerly. A moment later they walked into the dining room arm in arm. Close behind them followed Mr. Carey, his grief-worn face softened.

Ruth took good care not to let her eyes wander in the direction where her silent admirer sat.

And Guy Fillmore took good care that his lovely young wife had no excuse for looking elsewhere for attention and admiration.

Chapter 91

HARDING'S REWARD

THE HEROIC deed performed by Bob Harding had stirred the public as it had not been stirred in years. The newspapers printed lengthy stories of the young man who risked his own life to save a little child. Very little was said about the fact that he had escaped from the State's prison.

The people readily overlooked that part. What mattered his past? A man who could go through Hell voluntarily in order to rescue another human being from certain death, was not an ordinary mortal.

He must have some attributes given to few.

Meanwhile Harding lay at the hospital at the point of death. Every effort know to medical science was employed to save him. Every day a woman called, carrying a child in her arms.

"How is he?" she would ask, her voice quivering with gratitude. "Will he recover?"

"His condition is unchanged, but we all hope and pray that he will pull through," was the usual answer she received.

And then the woman with the child would go away, tears of sympathy in her eyes. Hour after hour she spent in prayers that must have reached the throne of the Almighty, for Bob Harding passed the crisis.

The nurse who watched over him had never seen a human being suffer like he did. With his body blistered and scorched, he tossed and moaned incessantly.

In his feverish delirium his voice called the name of the woman he loved so dearly.

It was always: "Betty—Betty—Betty!"

Newspaper reporters were determined to learn something about the young man's family connections. They appealed to the prison authorities.

But all they knew about young Harding was that he had been sent up for two years for assault with intent to kill. And they said that he had been a model prisoner.

One agressive and enterprising reporter found out that Harding hailed from Chicago and that he had been employed in that city as an automobile mechanic. He followed up this clue in the hope of discovering the woman called "Betty."

The result was a flat failure.

But this newspaper reporter was not the only one who had interested himself in Bob Harding's case.

A number of prominent citizens sent a petition to the governor, urging that Harding be pardoned unconditionally.

The governor, already familiar with the case, withheld his decision.

He communicated with the prison officials and asked for information. While this was entirely favorable so far as Bob's conduct during his confinement was concerned, the fact remained that he had escaped with the others.

However, there were mitigating circumstances.

The ringleader of the wholesale prison delivery was fair enough to admit that Bob Harding had taken no part in the conspiracy which resulted in the revolt.

The guards corroborated this statement by saying that the young hero had never been seen participating in the meetings of the convicts around the corridors.

And so the day finally came when the patient was on the road to complete recovery. He showed no elation because of that.

His attitude was that of chronic bitterness, for he fully expected to be returned to the penitentiary.

The nurse who had taken quite a fancy to the rugged and good-looking young automobile mechanic, tried to cheer him up.

"I can't understand why you are so unhappy," she told him one day as he sat in a chair propped up with pillows. "You have every reason to feel happy. In another week you will be well enough to leave the hospital."

His only reply was a bitter smile.

"Won't you tell me something about yourself?" the nurse went on coaxingly.

"I know better than to talk about myself." Harding returned in no pleasant manner. "Besides, you wouldn't be interested in the chatter of an escaped convict."

The woman glanced at him admiringly.

"Don't call yourself that," she reproved gently. "Every man and woman in this city thinks you are a hero. And there is one woman who idolizes you. She comes here every day and inquiresе about your condition. She——"

"Who is she?" Bob broke in, his handsome face alight.

"The mother whose only child you saved from certain death," the nurse told him.

Bob Harding looked his disappointment. What a fool he was to think that Betty would call on him.

"Oh," he said, and turned his face to the wall.

During the days which followed he received many callers.

Most of them were newspaper reporters who came to get Bob's own version of his heroic deed. But they could not persuade him to talk about it.

"Why, that was nothing," he would say to all of

them. "I was just lucky, that's all."

However, his modesty won him the admiration and respect of everyone who talked to him. And they went away convinced that this young hero was no ordinary criminal even if he did escape from the penitentiary.

Then the newspapers took hold of the case and united in urging the governor to pardon Harding.

The latter not for a moment believed that such a thing could be possible. He had already resigned himself to the fate of being returned to the penitentiary to receive an additional sentence for escaping with the others.

And this seemed about to come to pass when on the day he was to be discharged from the hospital two prison guards arrived.

He was delivered into their hands while one of the nurses wept alone in her room.

Bob Harding thought it was strange when the two guards did not put the handcuffs on him.

And they treated him with such kindness and consideration. As they left the hospital they were greeted by a battery of cameras operated by scores of newspaper reporters.

What did it mean? Whoever had heard of an escaped convict being photographed by the wholesale?

The trip back to the penitentiary did not consume a great deal of time. How well Bob Harding recalled his first entrance into that penal institution. But the exterior of the building seemed less forbidden and ominous.

As before, he was taken into the chief warden's office. But instead of being asked questions in a gruff manner, he encountered only kindness.

A number of officials, strangers to him, lounged about in chairs. They stared at Bob as if he were some curiosity or freak. At least that was the way he felt a-

bout it.

Other men crowded into the office. They were mostly guards of the prison and newspaper reporters.

The waiting played havoc with Harding's nerves. Why was he not taken back to his old cell as he fully expected to be? Why all this grinning and staring?

And then the chief warden entered. With him was another man of dignified mien and bearing. They went over to the desk and conversed for a little while in whispers. One of them picked up a sheet of paper.

"Harding," the chief warden said suddenly, "stand up."

Bob struggled to his feet.

"This gentleman here," indicating the man next to him, "is the personal representative to the governor of this state. You will listen attentively to what he has to say to you."

And Bob Harding did listen as he never listened before.

He heard himself euologized as a hero. He heard his unconditional pardon announced. And he heard that announcement greeted by continued hand-clapping.

The tears stood in his eyes, and he could not have spoken a word, although he was requested to say something.

"In addition to this," the representative of the governor went on, "I take pleasure in presenting you with a check for five hundred dollars. This money was contributed voluntarily by the citizens and friends of the woman whose child you saved.

"I hope you will use the money wisely, for it carries with it the best wishes of every contributor. But it does more than that. It also carries with it confidence and the belief that you are not an ordinary criminal, and that you deserve a chance."

Again there was prolonged handclapping. Then came the silence which Bob dreaded.

All eyes were upon him and he knew he was expected to accept the gift with a word or two of appreciation.

He cleared his throat repeatedly and finally found his voice. But not for long.

"I — I thank you," he murmured, unable to restrain the tears sufficiently to go on.

And then he hid his convulsed face in his hands and turned away.

The chief warden came over and slapped him on the shoulder. Others did the same. Someone gave him a dig in the ribs and laughed. Bob strained every nerve to master his emotions and at last succeeded.

Slowly the men filed from the office. Only Harding remained and the representative of the governor.

"Before I leave I would like to have a little chat with you, Harding," the latter announced. "Come and sit down here with me."

Bob sat down obviously nervous.

He had a well defined horror of being questioned. Somehow he felt that this man would attempt to pry into his past. Again he was agreeably disappointed.

"I am told that you are a very good automobile mechanic," the state official began. "Is that true?"

"Well," Bob answered, his handsome face flushed, "I know a little about machines."

"You are too modest," the other smiled. "The chief warden tells me that you have done wonders with some of the old cars around this institution. He also informed me that your conduct has always been that of a gentleman."

Again Bob blushed.

"You were sent up for beating the superintendent

of an automobile plant in Detroit," the governor's representative continued in a kindly tone. "That in itself was not such a heinous crime. And the fact that you were confined in this prison should not cause you to hang your head.

"That you are a good man you have proven conclusively. You did a mighty fine thing when you rescued that child. This city worships you as a hero because you accomplished the seeming impossible.

"That alone ought to make you feel proud and hold up your head. I am in need of a good and trustworthy chauffeur. I want you to come and work for me. Will you? I give you my word that the past shall never be mentioned again."

Harding met the speaker's glance for a moment, then dropped his eyes.

He did not like to refuse this man, yet, his plans for the immediate future made it necessary.

"I—I would like to work for you, sir," he stammered. "But I am very anxious to locate my wife first."

"Your wife? Ah, then you are married?"

"Yes, I am married," Harding admitted in a depressed manner. "My wife used to write to me regularly every week. Then suddenly her letters ceased. Why, I don't know. It maybe that she went back to her own kind, and——"

"Her own kind?" the other interrupted. "What do you mean?"

And then Bob told how he married the daughter of a wealthy Chicago aristocrat and how Betty was disowned by her father.

"I didn't care about the money part of it," he went on manfully. "I was well able to take the right care of her myself. But I can't bear the thought of them having weaned her away rom me."

The state official remained in silent thoughtfulness for a long time.

"Perhaps you jumped at the wrong conclusion, my boy," he said finally. "I happen to know Mr. John Procter personally. He is now living with his son-in-law at Oak Manor. If I were you I'd go to see him at once. I know he is a proud old codger, but he is fair."

Bob shook his head disconsolately.

"No, I wouldn't dare," he murmured. "Not with my prison record. He would kick me out and——"

"I don't think so," the other disagreed. "You have earned for yourself a reputation that no other man of my acquaintance can touch. No doubt John Procter knows all about the heroic young man who risked his life to save a child.

"And he must have seen your name in the newspapers. Go to him with your head up and demand what is yours. Go to him with your head up, young man. You have really nothing to be ashamed of. Better men than you were compelled to wear a prisoner's garb."

"But suppose my wife has forsaken me of her own will?" Bob quavered. "She might even have procured a divorce. Who could blame her for wanting to be separated from a convict."

The governor's representative smiled.

"You may be entirely wrong, young man," he declared. "I will give you a letter which I want you to hand to Mr. Procter. You may rest assured that he will receive you like a man. Now brace up and start life anew. I have a hunch that you will find your wife and that she will come back to you."

Harding, encouraged thus, held out his hand.

"I am grateful to you, sir," he cried, squaring his shoulders. "If you will give me a letter, I'll leave for Chicago at once."

The other nodded and turned to the desk.

For some little time he was busily engaged in writing. Occasionally, when at a loss for a word to express himself, he would steal a glance at Bob Harding and smile.

"So," he said when he finally rose and handed the young man the carefully sealed envelope. "I think this will straighten things out with Mr. John Procter. Now, go to him, my boy. And remember, keep your head up."

Harding grinned sheepishly.

"I will, sir," he promised. "And—and I am very grateful to you."

Chapter 92

THE RETURN

OLD JOHN PROCTER was seriously considering leaving Oak Manor and returning to his own home in Chicago. He had come to the conclusion that his efforts to promote harmony between his daughter and Philip Gordon were wasted. Not that he blamed his son-in-law. Phil had done everything any husband could. Yes, he had gone far beyond that.

He had stood for things which Procter would never have countenanced in a wife. His only complaint about Phil was that he allowed Alice too much freedom.

"Wives are not what they were in my day," he would say to Gordon. "They retained their modesty and dignity. They did not run to jazz parties and smoke cigarettes as they do now."

But existing conditions at Oak Manor were not the only reason why this heartsick old man longed to go back home.

He yearned for the scenes which brought him happiness in his declining years, for everything which reminded him of his Betty was dear to him.

When he spoke to Phil about his intentions, the latter exclaimed in a hurt tone:

"I can't let you go, dad. I need you."

"But I think it is best," the old gentleman persisted. "I have tried my best to point out to Alice the error of her ways. I received nothing but impudence for my pains."

Gordon made no attempt to deny this, for it was true. Alice had repeatedly wounded her father deeply

by ignoring him utterly.

"Stay at least another month," he pleaded. "You know the perplexing situation which confronts me. I never needed your sympathetic advice more than I do now."

And then the old gentleman reluctantly consented.

The days went on without anything important developing. Gordon applied himself to his business, while hired detectives continued the search for his first wife. Alice, unaware of this, pursued her usual frivolous course and extravagant mode of living.

One afternoon, while his daughter had gone on a shopping tour to Chicago, John Procter was seated on his favorite spot near the lake.

From this point he could see the winding road leading from the passing highway to the house.

He had often noticed strangers pass through the grounds, but the tall young man he saw now aroused his curiosity very much.

Perhaps he was an agent, and the housekeeper would take care of him. With this thought in mind he leaned back and puffed complacently at his cigar.

Presently, however, he was aroused from his reverie by approaching footsteps.

It was one of the servants of whom the old gentleman was particularly fond.

"Mr. Procter," she called when still a few yards distant, "I am sorry to disturb you, but there is a young man in the library who insists upon seeing you."

He rose and reached for his cane.

"Alright, Mary," he smiled. "I'll be right in."

With his tall figure bent, he walked a little faster than usual. As he entered the library the unexpected visitor rose from a chair.

"Mr. Procter, I am Bob Harding," he announced

without further ceremony.

"You are who?" John Procter stared at the speaker.

"I am Bob Harding, the man who married your daughter Betty," came back in a clear voice.

Evidently Harding expected an angry outburst of some sort, for he retreated a step and stood alert. But instead the old gentleman approached him, trembling in every limb.

"If you are Bob Harding," he cried. "Why isn't Betty with you?"

"I expected to find Betty here," the young man retorted, gazing about the room disappointed. "Isn't she——"

"No—no!" John Procter almost sobbed. "She is not here. But she is your wife and you must know where she is. You—you stole her away from me and now you come here to tell me that——" He stopped and wiped the cold perspiration from his brow.

Bob did not take offense at the words which were flung at him. After all, this man was Betty's father.

Perhaps he was still harboring a grudge against him. But this feeling of sympathetic understanding was quickly replaced by apprehension.

If his young wife was not with her father as he fully expected her to be, what had become of her?

"You are not very strong, sir," he said, forgetting his bitter disappointment when he saw the old man totter. "You better sit down and we'll talk the matter over."

John Procter's heart was torn wide open by this manly young fellow's consideration. He liked his appearance. He liked his frank open face, and he liked his mellow voice.

And he had condemned Betty for falling in love

with him. For a moment remorse consumed him.

"My boy," he quavered. "I have been an old fool. Because my daughter married you without my knowledge and consent, I drove her from the house. How bitterly I have regretted it, God only knows."

"Yes—yes," Harding soothed as he patted the old man's drooping shoulder. "Now you sit down in this chair and we'll try to come to a better understanding. The fault is not all yours. I should have come to you like a man and asked permission to marry her."

There was something infinitely tender in the way Bob Harding assisted his father-in-law into the chair.

Quite by accident their hands touched, and the next instant they were clasped in a hard grip.

Bob seated himself opposite John Procter, whose tear-filled eyes were pleading for an explanation which involved Betty.

"After we were married," Harding began, "we left Chicago and went to Flint, Michigan. I secured a position there and Betty and I were happy. I loved her as no man ever loved a woman. When she was ill for a few weeks, I nursed her back to health. But this caused me to come late to work several mornings.

"The superintendent of the firm discharged me for that. We had a few words, and to get even with me, he blacklisted me. I was not able to get another position. What little money we had saved, was spent, and I became desperate.

"I had been branded as a trouble-maker by the superintendent, and I hated him for that. Yes, I hated him as I never again want to hate any other man. I was ready to do anything to get even with him.

"When I met him one night on the street, I gave him a good thrashing. I was arrested and sent to jail."

Continued in next number

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